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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NASSAU 001382

SIPDIS

CA/OCS FOR SHIRLEY CRAWFORD

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TAGS: [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: TOURISM VS. RELIGION: ANTI-GAY RALLY TARGETS U.S.  
CRUISE SHIP AND CHRISTIE GOVERNMENT

REF: NASSAU 1342

Classified By: CHARGE ROBERT M.WITAJEWSKI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B).

#### SUMMARY

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1. (C) A number of prominent Bahamian religious figures led a "Save the Bahamas" rally in downtown Nassau on July 11 to protest the pending arrival of the cruise ship "Norwegian Dawn" which is scheduled to dock in Nassau with a group of "gay family" travellers on board the morning of July 16. Supporters claimed thousands participated; local media put the number of protesters at 300-500; Ministry of Tourism officials claimed only one hundred were in attendance. The religious leaders delivered fiery denunciations of homosexuality; accused Prime Minister Christie's government of wanting to make The Bahamas a "playground for gays"; and alleged that the current House of Assembly has "too many sexually-confused parliamentarians" -- a not so veiled references to Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell. Mainstream Bahamian religious figures characterized the rally's leaders as vocal extremists, though representing the overall anti-homosexual position that reflects most Bahamians' attitudes. Members of a local gay-rights advocacy group were also present at the protest and were verbally attacked by some of the demonstrators. HBO has been seeking out and interviewing representatives of both sides of the controversy. The HBO documentary film crew will also accompany the cruise ship and its celebrity host/financial backer Rosie O'Donnell when it docks in Nassau on July 16. Embassy has been in touch with the Ministry of Tourism in anticipation of Friday's expected protests.  
End Summary.

#### PROTESTING THE "SEXUALLY CONFUSED"

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2. (U) Several well-known Bahamian religious leaders organized and participated in the "Save the Bahamas Campaign" in Rawson Square, in the heart of downtown Nassau across the street from the country's parliament and adjoining the Prime Minister's offices, to protest the cruise ship, "The Norwegian Dawn", which will be docking in Nassau July 16 with a group of gay family passengers. The cruise, reportedly organized to promote homosexual family values through on-ship seminars, is reportedly being financially backed by celebrity comedienne, Rosie O'Donnell. An HBO documentary filming crew is scheduled to be aboard ship during its cruise and port calls in order to produce a film about gay family life.

3. (U) The prospect of the group disembarking while the cruise ship is in Nassau has exercised several local conservative religious figures. At their July 11 rally, they attracted a vocal crowd of supporters. Nassau's two principal newspapers estimated the protesters at between 300 and 500. However a representative from the Ministry of Tourism, Deputy Director General Ms. Vernice Walkine, balked at this number and insisted that there were more likely "a hundred and change, max..." when contacted by Embassy Political Officer on July 13, 2004.

4. (SBU) Leaders and organizers of the protest rally included Pastor Mario Moxey, Apostle Christopher Wallace, Dr. Myles Munroe, and about a dozen other religious figures. Apostle Wallace characterized gays as "sexually confused" and "sissies". One pastor declared that "The Bahamas doesn't need no 'sissy money' from Rosie O'Donnell."

#### ATTACK ON REPUTED GAYS IN GOVERNMENT

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5. (U) The rally's organizers did not limit their attacks to the cruise ship passengers. Expanding on his target to the media, Pastor Mario Moxey asked coyly if "The Ministry of Tourism has consented to HBO filming a documentary in the Bahamas aimed at showcasing our country as a destination for exclusive homosexual activist groups." Apostle Christopher Wallace of the Christian Tabernacle Church also attacked unnamed members of parliament as well, declaring that "we've gotta fight this in Parliament because we've got too many

sissies in Parliament...next election we cannot vote for sexually-confused parliamentarians." Apostle Russell continued with only a lightly-veiled reference to The Bahamian Foreign Minister (and member of parliament) Fred Mitchell scathingly declaring, "When we have our own parliamentarians saying they can't find no wife. Fifty-one year old men can't find no wife? All these gorgeous, brown-skinned women and you can't find no wife?" (sic)

#### MODERATION CAN COST YOU AIR TIME

16. (U) In their July 13, 2004, editions, The Bahamas two major daily newspapers, "Tribune" and the "Nassau Guardian", both reported that members of the Bahamas Christian Council, a powerful conglomeration of representatives from Christian denominations, were noticeably absent from the July 11 rally. The newly-elected Christian Council had been taking a more modulated stance on many issues since taking office, including homosexuality, than did the previous administration lead by Bishop Samuel Greene.

17. (SBU) When contacted by the Political Officer on July 14, Reverend Dr. Thompson, new president of the Bahamas Christian Council, said that he stands by his "don't ask, don't tell" policy. "We welcome anyone to the Bahamas, but do not want our visitors to push their beliefs on us." In previous meetings with the Embassy, Reverend Thompson, as well as Anglican Archbishop of The Bahamas, Drexel Gomez, have explained that they will not publicly attack gay visitors or gay Bahamians and summarized their stance on the issue as one of "hate the sin; love the sinner."

18. (C) Speaking with Charge July 15, His Grace Archbishop Gomez reiterated that he saw "no advantage or benefit" to any public demonstration against the visit, nor did he have any plans to speak out. Referring to Reverend Moxey, the Archbishop wryly noted that Rev. Moxey "appears to be using this to promote his own publicity." Archbishop Gomez was confident that there would be a "full contingent" of the Royal Bahamas Police Force in the area to preclude any untoward incident from occurring.

19. (C) Reverend Thompson also said that the HBO film crew had already contacted him asking about his views of the port call by the "Norwegian Dawn" cruise ship. Citing his more moderate stance, he claims he was told by HBO that his comments would not make the film, as they were looking for sound bites from what Thompson described as "renegade fanatics". Reverend Thompson said that no one from the Christian Council would participate in the protests, nor do they support them. There seems to be some dissent amongst the Christian Council as Bishop John Humes, Vice President of BCC, claims the Bahamas Christian Council fully supports the "Save the Bahamas" campaign to "The Tribune" on July 15.

#### PROTEST AND COUNTER-PROTEST ON MORNING OF ARRIVAL

10. (U) A second protest for the morning of July 16 in Rawson Square has been announced by the July 11 organizers. In the meantime, they claim they will have 50,000 Bahamian signatures on petitions condemning Prime Minister Perry Christie for allowing the cruise ship to dock in Nassau. Some of the organizers have also threatened that Christie would be voted out of office at the next election in 2007 if he refuses to join them in opposing homosexuals.

11. (U) Although its membership is only 150 -- with hundreds more reportedly "silent members" -- the "Rainbow Alliance of the Bahamas," a local advocacy group for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders plan to be present to welcome the passengers from the "Norwegian Dawn". A previous cruise that also had a gay group of passengers in early June came and went without the promised opposition rally. At this event the Rainbow Alliance set up a welcoming stand at the port for the day visitors. Both sides have promised to turn up the heat -- and the attendance -- for the arrival of The "Norwegian Dawn" with Rosie O'Donnell and HBO film crew on board.

#### EMBASSY EFFORTS

12. (C) Political Officer contacted the Ministry of Tourism July 13 to inquire about security arrangements when the controversial cruise reaches Nassau. Ministry representatives said that they would be present at Prince George's Wharf when the passengers disembark on Friday. Deputy Director General Vernice Walkine assured the Embassy that the Ministry was committed to the safety and happiness of all those on board, and that they planned to have extra security officers present at the rally. Ms. Walkine averred that the prospect of any violence actually occurring was

extremely unlikely.

113. (C) Efforts July 14 to contact the Rainbow Alliance to obtain information about their plans for July 16 were unsuccessful.

COMMENT

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114. (C) Given the country's peaceful culture where the fire and brimstone generally stays verbal rather than physical, Friday's planned protest -- if it happens -- promises to be loud, but non-violent. Promised protests at the last gay-oriented cruise to visit Nassau fizzled out and never happened after all sides had appropriately postured prior to the ship's actual arrival. Odds are that the same thing would have happened this time, but for two new variables thrust into the equation -- new factors that caused Prime Minister Perry Christie reportedly to spend Wednesday in an emergency cabinet meeting trying to defuse -- along with another simmering domestic political crisis. The new variables are the presence of a celebrity, Rosie O'Donnell, and an HBO crew looking for something controversial to film.

115. (C) Bahamian culture celebrates heterosexual prowess as it proudly proclaims its elaborate, overt religiosity. Bahamians also wryly acknowledge their compartmentalized religious beliefs, commemorated in a popular Bahamian ballad recounting the shortcomings of the "Sunday Christian" who weekly repents their previous six days of sinfulness.

116. (C) PM Perry Christie finds himself between a rock and a hard place on this controversy. He owes his election to the active intervention of the conservative end of the Bahamian Protestant religious spectrum. He also knows that 60 percent of the country's GDP depends on tourism. The conservative Protestant churches who were his main backers in the last election expect some payback. Christie, who generally prefers no decision to any decision that leaves anyone unhappy, cannot sidestep the issue without further enhancing his image as the Bahamian Hamlet. The FNM opposition is enjoying watching him squirm and doing its best to tighten the screws by repeatedly calling upon him to take a principled stand.

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